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AUTHOR Cooper, Elizabeth L.
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ABSTRACT

In 1990, a study was conducted at Snead State Junior College (SSJC) of students who were enrolled at the college in fall 1989 or winter 1990 but did not return in the subsequent quarter. Of 661 students identified as nonreturning, 489 were surveyed by telephone to determine their reasons for not returning. Demographic data on these students were obtained from college records to generate a profile of nonreturning students and to compare demographic data with stated reasons for not returning. Study results included the following: (1) the nonreturning student profile did not differ greatly from the student body as a whole, although slightly more female and day students did not return; (2) younger students and male students dropped out more often because of conflicts between school and jobs, while female students more often cited family responsibilities; (3) 32% of the respondents indicated an intention to return to SSJC at a later date; and (4) except for difficulties with scheduling necessary classes, most of the reasons given by students for not persisting were related to factors external to and beyond the control of the college. Based on study findings, it was recommended that the schedule of classes be planned on a yearly basis and made available to counselors and students; that the college develop a plan for continuing contact with nonreturning students and develop a better system for long-range enrollment analysis; and that the study of attrition be repeated in 3 to 5 years. A literature review and the survey instrument are included. (JMC)

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AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT RETENTION AT SNEAD STATE JUNIOR COLLEGE

Societal Factors Affecting Education

by

Elizabeth L. Cooper, M.S.

Snead State Junior College

Dr. Charles W. Collins

Regional Cluster

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A Practicum Report presented to Nova University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

December, 1990

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December, 1990

The major purpose of this study was to provide base data on student retention at Snead State Junior College during the 1989-90 year. No recent studies on attrition had been done at the College. Before a master plan to address recruitment and retention could be designed, the extent of the attrition problem would need to be established.

Students who did not return to the College in the fall 1989 quarter and the winter 1990 quarter were interviewed by telephone to determine their reasons for not returning. A total of 661 were identified and 489 of these students were interviewed. Their reasons for not returning were recorded.

Demographic data on these students was obtained from the College's mainframe computer files. A profile of the non-returning student was generated. The reasons for not returning were crosstabulated with each of the available demographic variables.

Results obtained showed that the non-returning student did not differ greatly from the typical student from the fall 1989 cohort. Younger students and male students dropped out more often because of conflicts between school and jobs. Female students dropped out more often because of family responsibilities. When asked if they planned to return to the College at some later date, thirty-two percent said that they definitely planned to do so.

Most reasons given by students for not persisting were related to factors external to the College and were largely beyond the control of the College. The one internal factor cited by several students was difficulty with scheduling the classes needed.

As a result of this study, it was recommended that the schedule of classes should be planned on a yearly basis and made available to counselors and students. It was further recommended that the College should develop a plan for continuing contact with those students who dropped out. A third recommendation was that the College should develop a better system for long-range enrollment analysis. Finally, it was recommended that the study of attrition at Snead should be repeated in three to five years.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to provide base data on student retention at Snead State Junior College during the 1989-90 year. "Only when institutions understand the reasons for nonpersistence will they be able to assert some control over their enrollments" (Ferguson, et al, 1986:8).

Background and Significance

At Snead College, the fall quarter enrollment has been the largest of the year with declining numbers of students enrolling in the subsequent quarters each school year. There has been little effort toward accounting for this decline. The records office did begin in 1988 to ask students who officially withdrew from college to complete an exit checklist of reasons for withdrawal. No analyses or follow-ups were ever done on these exit surveys because the numbers of cases collected were too few to be meaningful.

Many of the students who did not complete the term never officially withdrew from college. Others completed a term in good standing but did not return for the next term.

The approach to recruitment and retention at Snead was fragmented. The Dean of Student Services was assigned the responsibility for recruiting, which consisted of visits to area high schools. Other departments in the College also

carried out recruiting activities particular to their curricula and activities, as jazz band, athletics, agriculture, displaced homemakers, etc. The retention efforts were everyone's responsibility and therefore no one's responsibility. Some other isolated activities which were taking place were somewhat effective, but they needed to be shared and expanded. There was a real need to provide more coordination of the recruiting efforts and to tie together recruiting and retention with one master plan.

Such a master plan will be a large undertaking, but it can be accomplished in a step-by-step manner. Peter Ewell (1987) recommends this approach of focusing on the "big picture" first so that the results of more detailed studies can be more easily communicated by emphasizing how they relate to one another and to the total marketing strategy of an institution. Ewell also emphasizes the value of communicating partial data as it is accumulated and the importance of constantly reviewing the master plan to ensure its continued appropriateness. This study of student retention at Snead was supported by the College President as a first step toward that master plan. The President's letter of support is included in Appendix A.

This practicum was related to the Nova University seminar on Societal Factors Affecting Education. The study looked at both internal or institutional factors and external factors. The questions to be answered by this study were: (1) Is there a typical student who is likely to become

a drop out? (2) What are the major reasons students do not return? (3) Do these students plan to return at some later time? and (4) Do the results of this study suggest retention strategies or further research?

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Predictions of decreasing numbers of high school graduates in the 1990s and increased emphasis on assessment of institutional effectiveness have both served to stimulate interest in student retention in higher education. The result has been to focus on ways to retain more currently enrolled students by investigating why some students do not return. It makes little sense for institutions of higher education to beat the bushes for new students if they cannot adequately serve those who are currently enrolled. As frequently remarked, it costs less to keep a student than to recruit a new one.

Recent studies of student retention in two-year colleges have focused on rates of completion of degrees and rates of transfer to four-year colleges. In response to such studies, a growing number of scholars are taking a different look at the definitions of community college success. Two-year college completion rates are now being viewed in terms of completion of goals rather than degree completion. Alfred and Linder in a recent report found that community colleges have multiple missions, and a combination of different outcomes is necessary to describe student success (Wisniewski, 1990). Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by the American Council on Education, most students

do not complete any of the degree levels in the minimum expected timeframe. The periods of greatest difficulty for the students are the freshman year and the senior year (Ransom, 1990).

Part of the problem with these studies is that they do not take into account the diversity among the students in a community college. Nontraditional students are increasingly common in postsecondary education (Knepper, 1989 and Parnell, 1990a), especially in the community colleges. Dale Parnell, writing to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in the AACJC Journal (1990b:11), says, "Much to their credit, most college students have developed their own scholarship program called W.O.R.K." The majority of college students today are working full-time or part-time and attending college full-time or part-time. Fewer and fewer students attend only one college or go by way of a straight line from high school to a college degree. They may stop out several times and attend two, three or more colleges enroute to a college degree (Parnell, AACJC Journal, 1990b).

In most of the studies which have been done on persistence and progress through postsecondary education, students who leave postsecondary education without having completed a bachelor's degree are considered to be dropouts. The fault with these studies is that they have not followed these students over a long enough time period to allow for possible re-entry. They also have failed to take into account the students' goals. Many of these students entered

with no intention of earning a bachelor's degree. Their goal may have been a technical certificate or license or simply improvement of their knowledge or job skills in a particular content area. If these students attain their goals, then their patterns of attendance should be viewed as successes.

A study very similar to the Snead study herein was conducted at John Tyler Community College in Virginia in 1989 (JTCC's Holding Power). The researchers who conducted this study found that most of the non-returning students were part-timers; most had stated goals of upgrading skills, developing skills, or unclassified; most had completed less than fifteen credit hours; most left the college in good standing academically; and most said that they planned to return to the college in the future. The top reason given by both full-time and part-time students for not returning to JTCC was lack of time due to job requirements. Other top reasons were lack of time due to family responsibilities, completion of desired courses, and financial problems. Race and sex of non-returning students did not differ significantly from the general population of the college. The major recommendation which came from the study was that enrollment patterns should be tracked longitudinally in the future. Cohorts of students categorized by their educational goals at point of entry should be identified, profiled and followed. Since each subgroup would have specific goals and needs, each group could be targeted with specific intervention techniques to improve the retention rate of that subgroup.

Harriet Calhoun reports on a survey of students who withdrew from Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama in the spring of 1989. "Work conflicts, increased family responsibilities, and health problems" were the most frequent reasons given (1990:45). Over half of these students indicated that they planned to return to the college at a later time.

Understanding attrition and retention can help to ascertain ways of improving the situation. Studies of this problem may also aid in identifying dropout-prone students before it is too late to help them.

There are however certain cautions which must be observed in designing attrition studies. Dividing students into persisters and nonpersisters oversimplifies the population of non-returning students. Not being aware of the reasons students do not return to complete degrees could result in overestimating the retention problems at a college. Terenzini, in an article on the design of attrition studies (1982), cautions against attempts to statistically relate patterns of attrition and retention to causes. The establishment of causal links in the process is beyond research capabilities, and administrative actions based on it could do more harm than good. Lenning points out that "no one study, especially an institutional study, could include even half of the variables" which might be involved in student attrition (1982:51).

There are valid reasons for attempting to determine why students leave a college before completing their goals. Studies which report only the number of leavers in a given timeframe are misleading. The students' reasons for leaving may be positive rather than negative, and their intentions may be to return at some later time to complete their goals. Such studies must be designed carefully to accommodate as many reasons as possible. Recommendations based on the analysis of data from attrition studies must be made with caution. Accurate identification of nonpersisters may reveal the extent and the dynamics of the retention problem, but it can only provide insights to potential solutions.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to provide data on Snead College students who left the College in 1989-90 without completing a program of study. The problem solving methodology used in this study was designed to elicit responses on why the student did not return and if the student planned to return at some later time. Any additional pertinent comments by the student were also noted.

Procedures

The Snead computer programmer was requested to provide a listing of all students who enrolled in the fall 1989 quarter and did not return in the winter 1990 quarter. A second listing of students who enrolled in the winter 1990 quarter and did not return in the spring 1990 quarter was also requested. In the winter quarter, 403 students from the fall quarter did not return. In the spring, 355 students from the winter quarter did not return. These figures, when compared to the total enrollment for each of the quarters suggested an attrition rate of twenty-seven and twenty-five percent respectively.

Student who had graduated were deleted from the lists. The students who were suspended for academic reasons were also separated out for later inclusion in the final analysis of data.

The remaining lists contained the names, addresses and telephone numbers of 358 non-returning students in the fall quarter and 303 non-returning students in the winter quarter. A Nova associate cluster coordinator was consulted on an appropriate target number of student responses which would provide a valid data base for such a study. She suggested that the reasons for not returning for at least seventy-five percent of the students should be ascertained.

The Snead Admissions and Records Office had previously developed an exit survey form for students who withdrew from college. This form was used as a starting point for developing a means of categorizing and tabulating data. The form needed some modification to adapt it for a telephone survey. Once these obvious changes were made, a sampling of about fifty non-returning students were contacted by phone to see if the categories of responses appeared to be adequate. Further minor changes were made. The Snead Director of Admissions and the Academic Dean were both asked to review the modified survey form. They each made suggestions and approved the final version (see Appendix B).

One interesting note from the preliminary telephone survey was that when a parent of the student answered and the student was not available, the parent could usually give the desired information. It was decided that, if the student was not available, parental response would be accepted if the parent seemed to be well informed about the student's reasons.

Since a secretary would be helping with the survey, a script was written to ensure that each student would be asked the same questions in the same way. A copy of the script is included in Appendix C. The student's responses were to be checked off on the exit survey form and any additional comments which were considered by the interviewer to be pertinent were to be recorded.

First attempts to reach the non-returning students were made in the daytime. This approach did not reach many students. Students were then contacted during the early evening hours. Repeated phone calls over a period of about two months eventually reached an adequate number of those listed. No surveys were mailed.

The reasons students gave for not returning were checked off on an individual survey form for each student contacted. If additional pertinent comments were made, these too were recorded. A total of 489 non-returning students were surveyed.

The responses were coded numerically and entered into a computer file by student number. Additional data on these students was downloaded from the mainframe computer files. This additional data included gender, age, placement test scores (if available), cumulative credit hours, cumulative grade point averages, and whether the student was last enrolled for day classes or evening classes. Similar data on the total enrollment for the fall 1989 quarter was obtained from the data files.

The mean of each of the demographic variables on the non-returning students was determined to establish a general profile of the non-returning student. These were compared to the mean of the same variables for the student body as a whole in the fall 1989 quarter. An SPSS/PC+ computer program was used to execute a series of crosstabulations of the data on non-returning students in which the independent variable in each set was one of the demographic data items and the dependent variables were the 18 reasons for not returning.

Definitions of Terms

Grade point averages were divided into two categories to indicate student success at averages of 2.00 or better or failure to succeed at averages below 2.00 on a 4.00 scale. Cumulative hours were coded as either more than twelve quarter hours or less than twelve quarter hours. Student ages were categorized as either less than twenty-five years old or twenty-five years or older. Other classifications, such as gender or day versus evening attendance were obvious.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation to this study was the absence of a control group. Comparisons of demographic data of dropouts versus persisters were made, but the absence of a matched control group made any quasi-experimental analysis impossible. This however was not the purpose of this study.

A second limitation was the absence of information on the students' goals at the time of enrollment. This missing piece of data might have been supplied by the students after

they had dropped out, but such information supplied at that time would have been questionable. If a student had changed goals several times during enrollment, the memory might not be totally reliable. Also, students might not answer such a question truthfully.

A third limitation was also related to the veracity of the students' responses. Terenzini (1982) indicates that surveys of students after they have withdrawn may not be representative, not only because the responses would be of questionable validity, but also because people who respond are more likely to be positive than nonrespondents. This limitation was diminished somewhat by the large size of the sample and the fact that the telephone survey asked an open-ended question rather than giving the respondent a list of choices.

These limitations would reduce the internal validity of this study if the main purpose of the study had been to provide scientific evidence of relationships between variables. The purpose of this study was to provide a profile of the non-returning student. Choosing this design for the study did provide that base data and also provided additional information about students' current activities and possible plans to return to Snead.

Assumptions

The validity of this study depended on several assumptions. It was assumed that people would respond to a telephone survey, and that they would be truthful in their

responses. It was further assumed that the demographic data available in the computer mainframe was accurate. This last assumption was questioned a bit when it was discovered that one of the dropouts was a ninety-year-old.

Students who were suspended for academic reasons were not telephoned because their reasons for not returning were obviously some difficulty which resulted in insufficient academic progress. Also, it was assumed that such a telephone call could be embarrassing for these students. Although it is possible that some other circumstances may have contributed to their lack of academic progress, it was assumed that academic difficulty was the main factor.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to provide base data on students who dropped out of Snead College during the 1989-90 year. Reasons for not returning were determined for 76.3 percent of these students.

The telephone survey reached 270 out of an adjusted total of 388 nonreturning students from the fall 1989 quarter and 219 out of an adjusted total of 341 nonreturning students from the winter 1990 quarter. Only three students refused to answer any questions. When the thirty students suspended for academic reasons in the fall quarter and the thirty-eight students suspended in the winter quarter were added to the total number of reasons obtained through the survey, this provided information on 76.3 percent of the nonreturning students. These numbers are presented in tabular form in Table 1.

Table 1

Adjusted Numbers of Non-returning Students by Quarter

Categories	Total	Number Surveyed	Percent
Fall Quarter Suspensions	30	0	4.1
Fall Quarter Other	358	270	37.0
Winter Quarter Suspensions	38	0	5.2
Winter Quarter Other	303	219	30.0
Totals	729	489	76.3

The reasons students gave for not returning to Snead were tabulated with number codes corresponding to the reasons listed on the exit survey. The frequency of each type of response is shown in Table 2. As indicated previously, the students who were suspended for academic reasons were not surveyed.

Table 2

Telephone Survey of Non-returning Students' Reasons for Not Returning

Reasons for not returning	Frequency	Percent
1. Leaving to take job	41	8.4
2. Moving out of area	20	4.1
3. Family conflicts or responsibilities	35	7.1
4. Personal illness	28	5.7
5. Illness of family member	14	2.9
6. Conflict between school and job	61	12.5
7. Financial reasons, not specified	30	6.1
7A. Financial conflict	4	0.8
7B. Loss of personal income	4	0.8
7C. Loss of scholarship or financial aid	3	0.6
8. Disappointed with college life	3	0.6
8A. Desired classes/curriculum not available	33	6.7
8B. Dorm facilities undesirable	1	0.2
8C. Conflict with instructor	7	1.4
9. Inadequately prepared for college, reason not specified	4	0.8

Table 2, cont.

9A. Inadequately prepared for college academically	1	0.2
9B. Inadequately prepared for college emotionally	8	1.6
10. Accomplished goal	89	18.2
11. Personal reasons, not specified	16	3.3
12. Stop-out. Will return	32	6.5
13. Other reasons	55	11.2

In addition to the thirty-two who said that they had just stopped out temporarily, 122 who gave other reasons said that they definitely planned to return to Snead at sometime in the future, and another forty-six said that they might return. Another sixty-six said that they had accomplished their goals and had transferred to another institution. Fifty-five students cited other reasons for not returning. Although this category represented a relatively large number of students, their reasons for not returning were so varied that no one reason occurred frequently enough to constitute a separate category.

The demographic information on the surveyed students was downloaded from the mainframe computer. Table 3 shows a summary of some of this information. The ages ranged from sixteen to ninety years. The grade point averages ranged from zero to 4.0, and 157 out of the 489 students were first-quarter freshmen.

Table 3

Demographic Data of Surveyed Nonreturning Students

Mean age of students	27.3 years
Mean grade point average	2.31
First-quarter freshmen	32.1 percent of total surveyed

Table 4 shows similar data for the student body as a whole for the fall quarter 1989. The ages ranged from seventeen to sixty-six years. The grade point averages ranged from zero to 4.0, and 592 out of 1487 students were first-quarter freshmen. Sixty percent of these students were females and forty percent were males. One thousand and fifty (70.6 percent) were primarily daytime students, and 437 (29.4 percent) were primarily evening students.

Table 4

Demographic Data on Total Fall Quarter 1989 Enrollment

Mean age of students	23.1 years
Mean grade point average	2.49
First-quarter freshmen	39.8 percent of total enrollment

The reasons students gave for dropping out were cross-tabulated with each of the demographic variables. The results are shown in Tables 5 through 9. Of the 489 students surveyed, 301 (61.6 percent) were female and 188 (38.4 percent) were male. Three hundred fifty-four (72.3 percent) of these students were primarily daytime students, and 135

(27.6 percent) were attending evening classes. Half of the students (245 out of 489) were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four years. The remaining half were twenty-five or older. One hundred sixty-three of the 489 surveyed students had grade point averages below 2.00, which represents less than a C average on a 4.0 scale. One hundred fifty-seven of the surveyed students had completed less than twelve quarter hours at Snead.

The requirement of placement testing was begun in the summer of 1989, so many of these students had not taken the placement tests. Since only 169 of the 489 students surveyed had placement test scores, this variable was deleted from the study.

An unexpected outcome of the survey was that most of the students contacted were not only not reluctant to discuss their reasons but often eager to talk. Many of them volunteered additional compliments about the College and expressed appreciation for having been called.

TABLE 5

CROSSTABULATION OF REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING
WITH TIME OF DAY

	REASON	DAY STUDENT	EVENING STUDENT	ROW TOTAL
1.	TAKING JOB	36	5	41
2.	MOVING	13	7	20
3.	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	25	10	35
4.	PERSONAL ILLNESS	22	6	28
5.	FAMILY ILLNESS	10	4	14
6.	JOB RESPONSIBILITIES	42	19	61
7.	FINANCIAL REASON*	26	4	30
7A.	FINANCIAL CONFLICT	4	0	4
7B.	LOSS OF INCOME	4	0	4
7C.	LOSS OF FINANCIAL AID	2	1	3
8.	DISAPPOINTED W/COLLEGE LIFE*	3	0	3
8A.	AVAILABILITY OF DESIRED CLASSES*	20	13	33
8B.	DORMS UNDESIRABLE	1	0	1
8C.	CONFLICT W/INSTRUCTOR	5	2	7
9.	UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE*	2	2	4
9A.	UNPREPARED ACADEMICALLY	0	1	1
9B.	UNPREPARED EMOTIONALLY	7	1	8
10.	GOAL ACCOMPLISHED	65	24	89
11.	PERSONAL REASONS*	12	4	16
12.	STOP-OUT/WILL RETURN	23	9	32
13.	OTHER REASONS*	32	23	55
	COLUMN TOTAL	354	135	489

*DID NOT SPECIFY

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TABLE 6

CROSSTABULATION OF REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING
WITH AGE OF STUDENTS IN YEARS

	REASON	16 TO 24	25 TO 90	ROW TOTAL
1.	TAKING JOB	31	10	41
2.	MOVING	12	8	20
3.	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	9	26	35
4.	PERSONAL ILLNESS	13	15	28
5.	FAMILY ILLNESS	3	11	14
6.	JOB RESPONSIBILITIES	33	28	61
7.	FINANCIAL REASON*	14	16	30
7A.	FINANCIAL CONFLICT	1	3	4
7B.	LOSS OF INCOME	2	2	4
7C.	LOSS OF FINANCIAL AID	1	2	3
8.	DISAPPOINTED W/COLLEGE LIFE*	1	2	3
8A.	AVAILABILITY OF DESIRED CLASSES*	11	22	33
8B.	DORMS UNDESIRABLE	1	0	1
8C.	CONFLICT W/INSTRUCTOR	5	2	7
9.	UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE*	4	0	4
9A.	UNPREPARED ACADEMICALLY	1	0	1
9B.	UNPREPARED EMOTIONALLY	6	2	8
10.	GOAL ACCOMPLISHED	36	53	89
11.	PERSONAL REASONS*	8	8	16
12.	STOP-OUT/WILL RETURN	19	13	32
13.	OTHER REASONS*	34	21	55
	COLUMN TOTAL	245	244	489

*DID NOT SPECIFY

Graphics by Judy Williamson

TABLE 7

CROSSTABULATION OF REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING
WITH GENDER OF STUDENTS

	REASON	FEMALE	MALE	ROW TOTAL
1.	TAKING JOB	18	23	41
2.	MOVING	15	5	20
3.	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	29	6	35
4.	PERSONAL ILLNESS	22	6	28
5.	FAMILY ILLNESS	12	2	14
6.	JOB RESPONSIBILITIES	27	34	61
7.	FINANCIAL REASON*	17	13	30
7A.	FINANCIAL CONFLICT	3	1	4
7B.	LOSS OF INCOME	1	3	4
7C.	LOSS OF FINANCIAL AID	2	1	3
8.	DISAPPOINTED W/COLLEGE LIFE*	2	1	3
8A.	AVAILABILITY OF DESIRED CLASSES	23	10	33
8B.	DORMS UNDESIRABLE	1	0	1
8C.	CONFLICT W/INSTRUCTOR	3	4	7
9.	UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE*	0	4	4
9A.	UNPREPARED ACADEMICALLY	1	0	1
9B.	UNPREPARED EMOTIONALLY	2	6	8
10.	GOAL ACCOMPLISHED	48	41	89
11.	PERSONAL REASONS*	13	3	16
12.	STOP-OUT/WILL RETURN	23	9	32
13.	OTHER REASONS*	39	16	55
	COLUMN TOTAL	301	188	489

*DID NOT SPECIFY

Graphics by Judy Williamson

TABLE 8

CROSSTABULATION OF REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING
WITH GRADE POINT AVERAGE OF STUDENTS

	REASON	0 TO 1.99	2.00 TO 4.00	ROW TOTAL
1.	TAKING JOB	21	20	41
2.	MOVING	8	12	20
3.	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	7	28	35
4.	PERSONAL ILLNESS	12	16	28
5.	FAMILY ILLNESS	3	11	14
6.	JOB RESPONSIBILITIES	23	38	61
7.	FINANCIAL REASON*	9	21	30
7A.	FINANCIAL CONFLICT	2	2	4
7B.	LOSS OF INCOME	3	1	4
7C.	LOSS OF FINANCIAL AID	1	2	3
8.	DISAPPOINTED W/COLLEGE LIFE*	2	1	3
8A.	AVAILABILITY OF DESIRED CLASSES	9	24	33
8B.	DORMS UNDERSIRABLE	1	0	1
8C.	CONFLICT W/INSTRUCTOR	5	2	7
9.	UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE*	3	1	4
9A.	UNPREPARED ACADEMICALLY	1	0	1
9B.	UNPREPARED EMOTIONALLY	4	4	8
10.	GOAL ACCOMPLISHED	17	72	89
11.	PERSONAL REASONS*	7	9	16
12.	STOP-OUT/WILL RETURN	10	22	32
13.	OTHER REASONS*	15	40	55
	COLUMN TOTAL	163	326	489

*DID NOT SPECIFY

Graphics by Judy Williamson

TABLE 9

CROSSTABULATION OF REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING
WITH NUMBER OF CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED

	REASON	0 TO 11.50	12.00 TO 300.0	ROW TOTAL
1.	TAKING JOB	11	30	41
2.	MOVING	6	14	20
3.	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	14	21	35
4.	PERSONAL ILLNESS	9	19	28
5.	FAMILY ILLNESS	5	9	14
6.	JOB RESPONSIBILITIES	24	37	61
7.	FINANCIAL REASON*	12	18	30
7A.	FINANCIAL CONFLICT	1	3	4
7B.	LOSS OF INCOME	2	2	4
7C.	LOSS OF FINANCIAL AID	1	2	3
8.	DISAPPOINTED W/COLLEGE LIFE*	1	2	3
8A.	AVAILABILITY OF DESIRED CLASSES*	7	26	33
8B.	DORMS UNDESIRABLE	1	0	1
8C.	CONCLICT W/INSTRUCTOR	7	0	7
9.	UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE*	3	1	4
9A.	UNPREPARED ACADEMICALLY	0	1	1
9B.	UNPREPARED EMOTIONALLY	3	5	8
10.	GOAL ACCOMPLISHED	18	71	89
11.	PERSOANL REASONS*	4	12	16
12.	STOP-OUT/WILL RETURN	8	24	32
13.	OTHER REASONS*	20	35	55
	COLUMN TOTAL	157	332	489

*DID NOT SPECIFY

Graphics by Judy Williamson

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the survey were analyzed to determine if the nonreturning students differed from the student body as a whole. Further analyses were undertaken to see if within the group of nonreturning students there were differences in the reasons they gave for not returning that could be related to any of the demographic variables studied.

Discussion

A profile of the nonreturning student, when compared to the fall quarter 1989 cohort of students, revealed that the typical nonreturning student did not differ greatly from the student body as a whole. A few more of the nonreturning students were female (1.6 percent), and a few more were primarily daytime students (1.8 percent). The average age of the nonreturning student was slightly higher than that of the fall cohort by 4.2 years. If the mean grade point average for the nonreturning students had included those of the students on academic suspension, then the average for all of the nonreturning students would have been considerably lower than that of the student body as a whole.

Crosstabulations of the reasons students gave for not returning with the time of day of their class schedules (Table 5) revealed that a large number of these students in

both the evening classes and in the daytime classes did not return because they had accomplished their goals. When both reasons relating to jobs were combined, this accounted for 102 (20.9 percent) of the student responses. Work interfered with slightly more daytime students (22.0 percent) than evening students (17.8 percent). A significant number of both day and evening students indicated difficulty with scheduling the classes needed.

Two categories of student ages in years were cross-tabulated with the reasons for not returning (Table 6). When reasons relating to jobs are combined, 26.1 percent of the younger students cited these reasons while only 15.6 percent of the older students indicated work-related reasons for dropping out. Almost three times more older students cited family conflicts or responsibilities as reasons for not returning.

The greatest differences were observed in the comparison of reasons given by males and those cited by females. The percentage of males who gave reasons related to work was more than twice that of females who cited work-related reasons. Almost twice the percentage of females said that they were moving out of the area. The percentage of females who indicated family responsibilities (reasons three and five) was 13.6 percent while only 4.3 percent of the males gave these reasons.

The grade point averages of the nonreturning students, when crosstabulated with the survey results, did not reveal

significant differences. The job-related reasons were cited by slightly more (27.0 percent) of the students with grade point averages below 2.0 when compared to students with grade point averages at 2.0 or higher (17.8 percent).

The crosstabulation of reasons for not returning with the total number of credit hours completed did not reveal any unexpected differences. There were slightly more first-quarter freshmen students who cited job-related reasons (22.3 percent) than students with more than twelve quarter hours who cited these same reasons (20.2 percent). As might be expected, more students with more than twelve hours said that they had accomplished their goals.

Conclusions

Most of the reasons given by students for not persisting in college were related to factors external to the institution. The major internal factor cited by the students surveyed was difficulty with scheduling the desired classes.

Females were more likely to drop out because of family responsibilities. The finding that females dropped out more frequently because they were moving may also have been related to family. Also, responsibilities for the family welfare may have been the reason more males cited job-related reasons for dropping out. This seems to confirm Dale Parnell's finding that students are working while attending college.

Implications

Students who did not return because they had reached their goals or had successfully transferred to other institutions should be considered successes and should not be included in the calculations of attrition rates. Based on the results of this survey, the calculated attrition rate should be reduced to about twenty-two percent instead of the previously indicated twenty-six to twenty-eight percent of the enrollment.

Since many of the reasons cited by students related to factors external to the institution, it is likely that most of these situations are beyond the control of the institution. The major internal factor relating to the scheduling of classes is something which could possibly be improved.

The fact that many students thanked the surveyor for calling would imply that the students appreciated the concern of the college for them as individuals. Their eagerness to talk about their reasons also indicated their concern for the College.

Recommendations

The first recommendation resulting from this study was that the method of setting the schedule of classes should be reviewed. Since the number of sections of classes offered each quarter is limited by the number of faculty members available to teach and the space and time limitations of a small college, the schedules of the different divisions of the college should be integrated so that typical students

would be able to follow logical sequences of courses during their enrollment. The schedule should be planned on a yearly basis and made available to counselors and students.

Some early data from this study was shared with the Snead Planning Council at the beginning of the fall 90 quarter. The Dean of Instruction and the Division Directors began work on a yearly schedule of classes. When this schedule for the next four quarters was completed, it was posted for students, and copies were distributed to academic counselors. Each quarter the schedule will be updated so that students may plan for the next year of classes.

A second recommendation was that the College should have a plan for continuing contact with those students who dropped out. Special efforts should be directed toward those students who said that they planned to return or might return at a later date. This could best be accomplished as a part of a broad-based, coordinated plan for recruitment and retention.

Although the results of this study do not identify large numbers of students who admitted that inadequate academic preparation was a problem, when this number was added to those who were suspended for academic reasons, it became a significant reason. A plan should also be devised for early identification of students who are experiencing academic difficulties. Some of the students who indicated inadequate academic preparation and some of those who were suspended might have been salvaged if they had been placed in more

appropriate first classes or if they had received more help earlier.

This study of attrition has been shared with the Snead administrators and faculty and has been discussed by members of the Snead Planning Council. There is a consensus that a better system for tracking Snead's students would be desirable.

The State Department of Postsecondary Education is currently working on a tracking system at the state level. They are also working toward articulation agreements or legislation on articulation with the state four-year institutions. When these two plans are put into effect, a Snead plan for tracking enrollment should be easier to implement.

Finally, it is recommended that this study should be repeated in three to five years for comparison. Prior to the next such study, some means should be devised to record students' goals when they enroll. Also, the exit questionnaire should be revised to combine similar categories.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF SUPPORT

SNEAD STATE JUNIOR COLLEGE
DRAWER D
BOAZ, ALABAMA 35957

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

TEL. (205) 593-5120

June 11, 1990

Dr. Charles W. Collins
Nova University
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314

Dear Dr. Collins:

The development of a coordinated plan for recruiting and retaining students at Snead is a top priority. If this study can provide some indication of which students are likely to drop out, when they are likely to do so and why they drop out, then a retention plan can be developed to assist some of these students to continue toward their goals.

Elizabeth Cooper's study of student retention has my full support as a first step toward that plan.

Sincerely,

William H. Osborn
President

WHO:blk

APPENDIX B

EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

SNEAD STATE JUNIOR COLLEGE

EXIT SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to determine the reasons for student withdrawal from college. The information you supply will be confidential and will be used only for statistical purposes. Please take a few moments to complete this survey and return it.

Reason(s) for withdrawal

Check ( ) each answer which is relevant.

___ 1. Leaving to take a job

___ 2. Moving out of the area

___ 3. Family conflicts or responsibilities

___ 4. Personal illness

___ 5. Illness of family member

___ 6. Conflict between school and job responsibilities

___ 7. Financial reasons, did not specify

- ___ Financial conflict
- ___ Loss of personal income
- ___ Loss of scholarship or other financial aid

___ 8. Disappointed with college life, did not specify

- ___ Desired classes/curriculum not available
- ___ Dorm facilities undesirable
- ___ Conflict with instructor

___ 9. Inadequately prepared for college, did not specify

___ Academically ___ Emotionally

___ 10. Accomplished my goal

___ 11. Personal reasons, I prefer not to discuss it.

___ 12. Stop-out. Will return _____

___ 13. Other reasons. Please list: _____

_____

Thank you for your cooperation.

_____ _____

Date Signature

APPENDIX C

SCRIPT FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Script for Telephone Interview

1. Identify self and name of College.
2. State purpose of phone call. "In order to better serve our students, we are trying to determine why students stop attending Snead." (Don't use term "drop-out.") "Do you mind answering a few questions? Our records show that you were enrolled in the ____ quarter but did not return for the ____ quarter. Is that correct? Do you mind telling me why you did not return to Snead?"
3. If the respondent does not volunteer information on future plans, ask if he/she plans to return to Snead at some later date.
4. If respondent asks for further information, such as a class schedule or catalog, ask for mailing address and forward a copy of the request to the appropriate office.
5. Thank the respondent for his/her cooperation.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges

APR 05 1991